

This application is based on Japanese Patent Application Nos. 2000-212158 filed July 13, 2000 and 2000-380781 filed December 14, 2000, the contents of which are incorporated hereinto by reference.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

10 The present invention relates to an apparatus, a method and a recording medium generally applied in the speech recognition.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

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One reason for the fact that the oral communication is an excellent means for human beings to exchange information is that a listener can help a speaker's speech act or concept forming. In the human speech dialog, therefore, even when the speaker stumbles in his speech, the listener may guess what the speaker intends to say and suggest some candidates helping the speaker remember what he has intended to say. For example, when the speaker cannot remember the word "speech complementing" and
20 stumbles (hesitates) saying "speech, er...", the listener can help the speaker by asking whether he intended to say "speech complementing?". In this process, the listener

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presents a candidate for the word the speaker has intended to say by complementing the fragment of the word the speaker has uttered. Hence, this process may be regarded as word complementing.

5 The concept of complementing has been widely applied to text interfaces. For example, several text editors (e.g., Emacs and Mule) and UNIX shells (e.g., tcsh and bash) provide the complementing function (called "completion") for file names and command names. In such a function, when
10 the user presses a key (typically the Tab key) to call the complementing function (hereinafter referred to as "complementing trigger key"), the remaining portion of the fraction of a word that has been typed halfway is complemented. In WWW browsers such as Netscape
15 Communication and Internet Explorer also, the automatic complementing function (called "autocompletion") for URLs has been introduced, wherein the system provides lists of complementing candidates one after another while the user is typing.

20 Recently, the complementing function has been introduced into pen-based interfaces. For example, interfaces with automatic complementing functions such as a predictive pen-input interface and POBox have been proposed. (As for the predictive pen-input, refer to
25 Toshikazu FUKUSHIMA and Hiroshi YAMADA, "A Predictive Pen-Based Japanese Text Input Method and Its Evaluation", Transactions of Information Processing Society of Japan,

Vol.37, No.1, pp. 23-30 (1996); for POBox, refer to Masui, T., "An efficient Text Input Method for Pen-based Computers," Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '98), pp. 328 - 335, 1998).

For a speech input interface, however, the speech complementing input has not been realized because there has been no appropriate means for calling the complementing function while the speech is being inputted.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to provide speech complementing apparatus, a method and a recording medium that can complement speech inputted.

The present invention has enabled to provide a better speech input interface mainly operated by speech recognition by introducing a speech input interface function (hereinafter referred to as "speech complementing" or "speech completion"), which enables a system to complement an uttered speech even when a user speaks only fragments of words without all information that the user has intended to input during the speech is being inputted to the system.

In order to realize the speech complementing, there are two possible methods as in the case of text complementing. One is complementing by the complementing

trigger key and another is automatic complementing wherein complementing candidates are presented in succession during the user's utterance. However, in the attempt to complement the speech automatically, it is unlikely that
5 the system can present appropriate candidates in succession with the same accuracy as provided for the text complementing because the fragment of speech is very ambiguous for the system to recognize. Therefore, it is very possible that the automatic complementing function
10 itself gets confused too much. Hence, the automatic complementing does not seem to be applicable to the speech complementing, and it becomes important for the speech complementing that the complementing function can be called intentionally and effortlessly by the user when the
15 user wants to see the complementary candidates. The key to realize an easy-to-use speech complementing function lies in how the complementing function can be called, in other words, what kind of complementing trigger key should be used in the speech complementing application.

20 According to the present invention, it is made possible for the user to call the complementing function, when desired, without any particular effort by assigning the filled pause, which is a phenomenon of stumbling (one of hesitation phenomena), the role of complementing
25 trigger key. Filled pauses are classified into two groups which are fillers (transition words) and word lengthening (prolongation of syllables). Here the filled pauses mean

the prolongation of vowels during both of fillers and word lengthening. Fillers in Japanese such as "eh...", "uhm...", "ah...", "maa...", "nnn...", "ano-...", "sono-...", "kono-...", etc., and fillers in English such as "er...", "erm...", "uh...", "um...", etc. include the filled pauses. It is quite a natural behavior for human beings to utter filled pauses during speech input, which can be utilized as the complementing trigger key. In fact, the filled pause plays a similar role in human conversation. A Speaker often stalls for time with a filled pause to remember the next word, or sometimes utilizes a filled pause expecting help from the listener.

The above and other objects, effects, features and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following description of embodiments thereof taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a flowchart that illustrates the speech complementing operation;

Fig. 2 shows a screen during the input of "utada-" ("-" indicates a filled pause.);

Fig. 3 shows the screen during the filled pause of "da-;"

Fig. 4 shows a screen displaying the complementary

candidates;

Fig. 5 shows a screen immediately after "No. 1" is inputted;

Fig. 6 shows a screen wherein the " No. 1" candidate
5 is highlighted;

Fig. 7 shows a screen wherein the " No. 1" candidate is confirmed;

Fig. 8 is a block diagram that illustrates the system configuration of the speech complementing apparatus
10 according to the present invention;

Fig. 9 is a flowchart that illustrates the speech complementing program; and

Fig. 10 is an illustration for explaining the speech complementing.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Two embodiments according to the present invention are described below.

20 (1) Speech Forward Complementing: Speech Complementing Method Using a Filled Pause

In the first method, by assigning the filled pause, which is a phenomenon of stumbling (one of hesitation phenomena), the role of complementing trigger key, it is
25 made possible for the user to call the complementing function, when desired, without any particular effort.

When the phrase "onsei hokan (in English, speech

complementing)" is registered in the dictionary of speech recognition, for example, the filled pause such as prolongation of the vowel "i" like "onsei-" ("-" indicates a filled pause) or the utterance of the filler (transition word), "eh..." (in English, "er-..."), like "onsei, eh..." (in English, "speech, er-...") causes the system to display the complemented phrase "onsei hokan" (in English, "speech complementing"). When there are a plurality of complementary candidates, the system displays the candidates on the screen or produces synthesized audio response so that the user can select an appropriate candidate. When there is only one candidate, the system may request the user to confirm it or automatically complete the input.

(2) Speech Backward Complementing: Complementing Method Using Speech Wild Card

In the second method, when the user utters a specific wild card key-word such as "nantoka-..." (in English, "so and so..., " or "something...") intentionally producing a filled pause, the system assumes that the whole key word is a wild card (arbitrary character string), and complements the wild card portion by determining from the context.

For example, when the phrase, "speech complementing," is registered in the dictionary of a speech recognition system, if the user utters the key word with a filled pause, "so and so... complementing," a list of

complementary candidates with the part of "so and so..." being replaced with appropriate character strings, for example, "speech complementing," "speech forward complementing," and "speech backward complementing," are
5 displayed for the user's selection. When there are a plurality of complementary candidates, the system may display the candidates on the screen or produce synthesized voice response. And the user can select an appropriate candidate from the candidates. When there is only one
10 candidate, the system may request the user to confirm it or automatically complete the input.

While speech complementing can be performed for various levels including word, phrase, and sentence, speech complementing for words using the filled pause
15 method is explained hereunder. A word here is defined as that which is registered in the word dictionary (of a language model) of the speech recognition system; a phrase can also be registered as a single word in the word dictionary. Therefore, when a combination of family name
20 and given name such as "utada hikaru" is registered as a word, the filled pause after the syllable, "da", of "utada" generates candidates including "utada hikaru".

Referring to Fig. 1, the user can input a word, as described below, depending on the speech complementing
25 that uses a filled pause.

1. When the user prolongs a vowel halfway during the utterance of a word, a list of complementary candidates

(words) beginning with the portion that has been uttered is immediately displayed with numbers.

Referring to Figures 2 and 3, for example, when the user inputs "utada-," as shown in Fig. 4, complementary candidates are displayed as follows:

1. utada hikaru 2. uehara takako 3. MR.DYNAMITE

2. When the candidates are so many that all of them cannot be displayed on the screen, the mark, "Next candidates," is displayed. In such a case, the user can see other candidates by uttering the word or words, "next" or "next candidates". If there is no appropriate candidate or the user wants to input another word, the user can proceed to another utterance of speech without making selection in the following procedure 3 shown below.

3. The user can select one of the candidates seeing the list of candidates by one of the following four methods.

(a) The user selects a candidate by uttering a number of the candidates as shown in Fig. 5. (For example, by saying "number one" or "one.")

(b) The user selects a candidate by uttering the remaining part of the word. (For example, by saying "hikaru.")

(c) The user selects a candidate by uttering the whole word (For example, by saying "utada hikaru.").

(d) The user selects a candidate using some other device such as a keyboard, mouse, or touch panel.

When a candidate is selected, it is highlighted as shown in Fig. 6, and it is confirmed as the result of the

speech recognition as shown in Fig. 7.

In the speech complementing, it is possible to repeatedly call the candidates during the input of a word. For example, when inputting "Southern All Stars," the user
5 can display the candidate list after saying "Southern-...", and then display a narrowed down list after saying "All-...", and finally the user can confirm by saying "Stars". It is necessary, as shown in this example, to arrange so that the complementary candidates are not called
10 when the long vowel of "All" is uttered but they are called only when the intentional filled pause is made.

After a speech input interface system capable of speech complementing was actually constructed and operated, and it has been confirmed that the speech
15 complementing practically functions enabling the user to perform interactive speech input by calling the complementary candidates. It has been proved that the speech complementing function requires no special training, and the interface is easy to use with intuitive
20 operation. The speech complementing was particularly effective when inputting long words and phrases.

Although it has been confirmed in the test operation that the function is especially effective in inputting proper nouns such as names of songs and artists or addresses,
25 it is also applicable immediately to other voice input applications for various systems.

According to the present invention, firstly, the

function helps the user recollect. Even when the user wants to input something that he does not remember clearly, he can input it with the system's help by uttering a part of the word or words as much as he remembers.

5 According to the present invention, secondly, when the phrase being inputted is long and complicated, the user has only to utter a portion of the phrase that is enough for the system to identify the content of the phrase so that the system can complement and input the remaining.

10 Additionally, according to the present invention, the speech complementing system causes less mental resistance to use because input can be made by uttering a portion of a word, phrase, or sentence; whereas the most of conventional voice interfaces require the user to
15 carefully utter the whole sounds to the last.

In Fig. 8, a preferred embodiment of the speech complementing apparatus based on the speech complimenting method according to the present invention is described hereunder.

20 Referring to Fig. 8, the speech complementing apparatus comprises a CPU 10, a system memory 20, an input/output (I/O) interface 30, an input device 40, a display 50, and a hard disk (HD) 60. Information processing devices, such as a personal computer, which are
25 capable of executing programs may be used for the speech complementing apparatus.

The CPU 10 executes the program that is described

below, which has been loaded in the system memory 20 to facilitate the speech complementing function. The system memory 20 has a RAM to store the program to be executed as well as to temporarily store the input/output data to the CPU 10.

The I/O 30 which is connected to a microphone (not shown) transmits the speech inputted from the microphone to the CPU 10. The input device 40 having a mouse, a keyboard or a touch panel instructs the operation of the CPU 10. The display 50 displays the inputted information from the input device 40 and the recognition results of the speech recognition processing which was executed by the CPU 10. The character strings complemented by the CPU 10 are also displayed. Furthermore, when there are a plurality of character strings that may be complemented, the plural sets of complementary character strings are displayed for the user to make the selection through the I/O 30 or the input device 40.

The hard disk 60 stores a speech recognition program with a speech complementing function, word dictionaries, a dictionary for operating an interface, data that are used by these programs for display, and other various data.

As the speech recognition program, an equivalent of an article on the market can be used. However, it needs to improve by adding the following complementing function.

When a filled pause period in the inputted speech is detected in the processing of the speech recognition, a

list of complementary candidates is made. The processing for making the list of the complementary candidates is realized by extending the conventional program of a continuous speech recognition as described below.

5 At that time, it needs not to include harmful effects for recognizing a normal speech which does not include a filled pause. Though complementing of a single-word utterance is described below, complementing words and phrases in a continuous speech input is also possible in
10 the same framework. The system uses a word dictionary (person's names etc.) to be inputted, a dictionary of wild card key-words and a dictionary for operating an interface (candidate number and instructions for displaying other candidates etc.). The word dictionary has a tree
15 structure as shown in Fig.10. The recognition processing starts from the root of the dictionary and increases hypotheses corresponding to the branching frame by frame, tracing the nodes toward the leaves. The wedge marks represent hypotheses. When the filled pause is detected,
20 whether the hypothesis with highest likelihood at this point is a wild card key-word or not is judged to determine which of speech forward complementing and speech backward complementing is executed.

25 In the case of the speech forward complementing, the generation of complementary candidates is realized by tracing from the effective top- N_{seed} hypotheses at this point (N_{seed} hypotheses from top in order of high likelihood)

to the leaves. Those candidates are numbered in order of high likelihood to obtain top- N_{choice} candidates.

The nodes corresponding to hypotheses used in the generation are referred to as seeds. For example,
5 assuming that the uppermost black circle is a seed, complementary candidates are "Blankey jet city" and "Black flys". At the same time, it is checked how far in each candidate has been uttered by obtaining the phoneme string that has been recognized. In order to make it possible
10 to select by uttering the remaining part of a word, after the user looked at the candidates, an entry node table is introduced for registering the root from which starts. Thereby, the recognition from the middle of a word is enabled. For the normal recognition starting from the top
15 of a word, only the root of the word dictionary is registered. When the recognition from the middle of the word should be enabled for the candidate selection, the seed of each complementary candidate is added temporarily as a root (only the next utterance after the utterance with
20 the filled pause). Although added entries are recognized by uttering only the remaining phoneme string after the filled pause, the result of the recognition is a whole word.

On the other hand, in the case of the speech backward complementing, a latter part of a word uttered after end
25 point of the wild card key-word with the filled pause is recognized so as to generate candidates. This recognition from the middle of the word is realized by temporarily

adding, to the entry node table, the syllables in the middle of all the words in the word dictionary (only just after a wild card key-word). Then the hypotheses which reached to leaves are numbered in order of high likelihood and N_{choice} hypotheses from top are sent as complementary candidates. After that, in order to make it possible to select candidates by uttering the remaining first-half part of the word, the word in which end of the unuttered phoneme string of each candidate is a leaf is temporarily registered. For example, when "koyanagi yuki" is inputted in the form of the "something... yuki" (or "so and so... yuki"), the word in which the end of /koyanagi/ is a leaf is temporarily added to the word dictionary.

Referring to Fig. 9, the operation of the speech complementing apparatus will be described as follows. Fig. 9 shows the content of the speech recognition program. The speech recognition program is loaded to the system memory 20 from the hard disk 60 according to the instruction from the input device 40, and then executed by the CPU 10. When a speech is inputted from the microphone (not shown) through the I/O 30, the CPU 10 temporarily stores the speech in the form of digital signal in the system memory 20 (step S10). At this time, the CPU checks the inputted speech to detect a period of the filled pause (prolongation of vowels and a continuous voiced sound) by using a method disclosed in Japanese patent application No. 11-305768 (1999).

When the period of the filled pause is detected, speech recognizing and complementing of the speech data which has been stored in the system memory 20 are executed by using the speech recognition program (step S30). The
5 result of speech recognition is obtained by generating a number of hypotheses of phoneme strings based on the word dictionary and the grammar and by evaluating the likelihood of those hypotheses in order to obtain appropriate results from top in order of high likelihood.

10 In parallel with such processing, the CPU 10 is always judging whether or not there is a filled pause. When the existence of the filled pause is not detected, the process proceeds along steps S30 and S70 and then the result of the speech recognition obtained is outputted.

15 The complementary candidates are displayed on the screen of the display 50. The user selects suitable one in the complementary candidates by using a speech, the mouse or the touch panel (step S60). When the number of the candidates is one, it is possible to wait for selection
20 for confirming by the user and automatic selection (decision) may be allowable. The selected candidate is decided as the final result of complementing. The result of complementing is also outputted as the result of the speech recognition (step S70).

25 In addition to the embodiment described above, the following embodiments are also possible:

1) The output units for the complemented speech recognition

results can include, in addition to the display, a printer, a speaker for synthesized voice output, a communication device to other computers, and a drive that writes information in recording medium such as a floppy disk.

5 When synthesized voice is output from the speaker, the voice may be synthesized based on the character strings resulting from the speech recognition using a conventional voice-synthesizing program.

10 Furthermore, when there are a plurality of complementary character strings, the selective candidates may be informed to the user using the synthesized voice. In such a case, the user may input the selection by speech input as well as by the input device 40. When the speech input is used, the CPU 10 recognizes the input speech and
15 identifies the complementary character string that has been selected by the user based on the speech recognition results.

2) The speech complementing apparatus may utilize any equipment such as an IC chip, a cellular phone, a personal
20 computer, and other information processing devices.

The present invention has been described in detail with respect to preferred embodiments, and it will now be apparent from the foregoing to those skilled in the art that changes and modifications may be made without
25 departing from the invention in its broader aspects, and it is the intention, therefore, in the appended claims to cover all such changes and modifications as fall within

the true spirit of the invention.

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